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JOHN LOCKE (1632-1704)

Biography and overview of the *Essay*

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# Locke's biography

- 1632-1704
  - Physician and member of the Royal Society
  - Associate of scientist-philosophers Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton
  - Initially based in Oxford, later flees to Holland
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## Locke's biography (*continued*)

### --Political affiliations and career

- Locke's patron is Lord Shaftesbury, leader of the parliamentary 'Whig' opposition to the Stuart dynasty (Charles II and James II)
    - The silver shant episode
    - The Constitution of Carolina
  - Locke flees with Shaftesbury to exile in Holland
  - And eventually returns to England with the overthrow of the Stuarts in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688
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## Locke's biography (*continued*)

### --Major publications

- Locke probably composed the bulk of his major works in exile. They were all published just after the overthrow of the Stuarts in 1688.
  - His most important works:
    - ❑ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689)
    - ❑ *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1689)
    - ❑ *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)
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# The project of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

- 📞 The main project: To urge an ‘epistemological turn’ in philosophy
  - 📞 To combat the doctrines of *innate ideas* and *innate knowledge*
  - 📞 To impose an appropriate humility on our speculative reasoning in metaphysics and the sciences
  - 📞 To advance various ‘deflationary’ positions in metaphysics, in keeping with proper epistemic humility (for instance, on *free will*, *substance*, *personal identity*, the *mind-body problem*.)
  - 📞 To advocate for the ‘new science’
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